AVATAR

The Last Airbender

BOOK TWO: EARTH
CHAPTER NINE: "Bitter Work"

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ACT I

EXT. QUARRY CAMPSITE - DAWN

The gang has made camp in a natural quarry. (Note: This should be the same location as where episode 2.08 ends.) It's a true Earthbender's paradise, with various interesting kinds of rock, sheer cliff faces with multiple tiers of large terraces, at least one area with water. Possibly a cool geological formation, maybe with crystals. Everyone is fast asleep, except Aang -- he looks like a kid on Christmas morning, waiting for the day. As soon as the sky begins to get light, he leans over to Sokka who is fast asleep.

AANG
(excited whispering)
Today's the day!

Sokka opens his eyes for a moment -- can someone possibly be talking to him at this ungodly hour? He closes them again.

AANG (cont'd)
Can you believe it? After all that time searching for a teacher, I'm finally starting Earthbending. And this place -- it's perfect, don't you think? Sokka?

Sokka turns to face Aang and just stares at him in response.

AANG (cont'd)
Oh -- you're still sleeping, huh?

Sokka just keeps staring.

AANG (cont'd)
(whispering again)
Sorry.

Sokka closes his eyes and turns back over. A long beat.

TOPH (O.S.)
Good morning, Earthbending student!

Aang is immediately on his feet, and bows to his new master.

AANG
Good morning, Sifu Toph.

KATARA
(waking up)
Hey, you never call me Sifu Katara.

AANG
Well if you think I should--

Sokka stares at all three of them -- if this were Mission Hill, we'd be seeing daggers shoot from his eyes.

TOPH
Sorry, snoozles. We'll do our Earthbending as quietly as we can.

Toph punctuates her remark with an exciting Earthbending move that ends with a THUNDEROUS BOOM. Sokka gets up, wrapping his blanket around him, and turns to Toph.

SOKKA
(INARTICULATE FRAZZLED YELLING)

He wanders off.

AANG
(to Toph)
So, what move are you going to teach me first? Rock-a-lanche? The Trembler? Ooh, maybe I could learn to make a whirlpool out of land?

TOPH
Let's start with "Move a Rock."

AANG
(gung ho clapping)
Sounds good, sounds good.

Toph begins demonstrating.

TOPH
The key to Earthbending is your stance. You've got to be steady and strong. Rock is a stubborn element -- if you're going to move it, you've got to be like a rock yourself.

Aang watches her as she "screws" her feet in. We see the joints of Toph's toes actually extend as she roots herself.

AANG
Like a rock. Got it.

TOPH
Good. Now the actual motion of this one is pretty simple...

She faces a large boulder. From her perfect stance, she completes the move, sending the boulder FLYING fifty feet, where it crashes into a cliff wall and explodes. Aang and Katara both APPLAUD with golf claps.

TOPH (cont'd)
Okay, you ready to give it a try?

AANG
I'm ready.

Aang faces a boulder. He gets in his stance, screws himself in. He focuses. Then he executes the move, exactly as Toph had -- but the boulder doesn't budge, and it's Aang who goes FLYING BACKWARDS fifty feet! He lands in some water. (Or he flies into Appa, who sleeps right through it!) Sokka, still wrapped in his blanket, has watched this go down.

SOKKA
Rock beats Airbender.

A WHITE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

The kind you might see at the end of your life. As we approach the light (iris-ing in), it becomes a hazy scene...

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Uncle Iroh in his forties. Happier times. Iroh and his son, Lu ten (5), play a version of tag. When Lu Ten catches up to Uncle and tags him, he yells:

LU TEN
I got you dad.

Uncle "collapses" to the ground, as both of them LAUGH. We pull out to see...

EXT. REFLECTING POOL - DREAM

The image is in a beautiful reflecting pool. Uncle kneels in front of the pool looking into it. He looks up from the pool to a gravestone. We see this is a memorial grave to his son.

UNCLE
My beloved Lu ten... I will see you again.

Uncle tears up and bows his head.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - MORNING

UNCLE'S POV:

Hazily, he blinks his eyes open and comes to -- he sees Zuko.

NORMAL POV

Uncle is in a bed in an abandoned house. His upper body is bandaged from where he was struck by Azula.

ZUKO
Uncle! You were unconscious. Azula did this to you -- it was a surprise attack.

UNCLE
Somehow that's not so surprising.
(PAINED NOISE)

Uncle rubs grabs his chest where it hurts. Zuko produces a tray with a tea pot and a cup. He pours Uncle some tea. Uncle lifts the cup to his lips.

ZUKO
I hope I made it the way you like it.

From Uncle's wince we see it's not so good, but he smiles and lies to Zuko.

UNCLE
Mmm. Good.

Uncle downs the rest like a shot of whiskey to get it down quick, "shaking it off" at the end.

UNCLE (cont'd)
That was very, um... bracing.

Zuko lifts the tea pot to pour him another cup.

ZUKO
So Uncle, I've been thinking. It's only a matter of time before I run into Azula again. I'm going to need to know more advanced Firebending if I want to stand a chance against her.
(beat)
I know what you're going to say -- she's my sister and I should be trying to get along with her.

UNCLE
No, she's crazy and she needs to go down.

With great effort, Uncle manages to sit up and place his feet on the ground.

UNCLE (cont'd)
It's time to resume your training.

EXT. QUARRY CAMPSITE - MORNING

Aang is a bit dazed by his Earthbending failure.

KATARA
I don't understand what went wrong. He did it exactly the way you did.

AANG
Maybe there's another way -- what if I came at the boulder from a different angle...

TOPH
No, that's the problem. You've got to stop thinking like an Airbender. There's no different angle, no clever solution, no trickety-trick that's going to move that rock. You've gotta face it head on. And when I say head on, I mean like this!

Suddenly, Toph BANGS her head into the boulder, instantly pulverizing it -- Aang JUMPS back, startled.

Katara takes Toph aside for a moment.

KATARA
I've been training Aang for a while now. He really responds well to a positive teaching experience. Lots of encouragement, and praise -- kind words. If he's doing something wrong, maybe a gentle nudge in the right direction.

Toph smiles, humoring Katara.

TOPH
Thanks Katara. A gentle nudge -- I'll try that.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. QUARRY CAMPSITE - TRAINING MONTAGE

Toph yells at Aang.

TOPH
Keep your knees high, twinkle toes!

We see Aang, carrying a heavy stone on his shoulders, running an "obstacle course" that Toph creates and moves as he goes.

CUT TO:

A close up as Toph really SPIRALS her feet into the ground, getting rooted in her stance. Aang watches, and then spirals his own feet. Then Toph suddenly LUNGES at him:

TOPH (cont'd)
Rock-like!

Again, Aang FLINCHES -- but this time as he springs backwards, Toph creates pointy stalactites right behind him -- Aang barely manages not to poke himself.

CUT TO:

Aang, blindfolded, does a "whack-a-mole" exercise using Sokka's club, as Toph makes rocky "moles" pop up. Momo comes over to see what's going on, and barely avoids being whacked.

CUT TO:

Toph bends a sort of "rock armor" on herself, and acts as a living sparring dummy -- as Aang pushes one shoulder only to have the other come forward, etc.

CUT TO:

Remaining rooted in his stance, Aang throws a sack of rocks from behind him up in the air, then moves forward and catches it. He repeats this throw, move, catch, all the while staying rooted. When he reaches Toph, she LUNGES at him.

TOPH (cont'd)
Rock-like!

He blinks, but doesn't flinch a bit. Toph nods, approvingly. Aang beams. Toph punches him on the shoulder, tough-guy teammate style -- Aang SILENTLY GRIMACES in pain.

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - DAY

Sokka is perched near the end of a tree branch, watching a CUTE ANIMAL below.

SOKKA
(sotto)
You're awfully cute, but unfortunately for you, you're made of meat. Just a bit closer...

When it does wander closer, Sokka leaps from the tree--

SOKKA (cont'd)
("GERONIMO"-STYLE NOISE)

But it steps out of the way, and when Sokka's feet hit the ground, it gives way and he immediately sinks up to his waist into a crevasse that has been hidden by surface debris.

SOKKA (cont'd)
(PAINFUL LANDING NOISE)

Curious, the animal approaches Sokka. Sokka lunges for it.

SOKKA (cont'd)
Gotcha!

But his sudden movement again causes the ground to give, and this time he sinks up to his neck, with his hand pinned next to his ear. It's a comically awkward position.

SOKKA (cont'd)
You are one lucky little meat creature.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

Uncle prepares a pot of tea as he speaks.

UNCLE
Lightning is a pure expression of Firebending -- without aggression. It is not fueled by rage or emotion the way other Firebending is.

Uncle pours tea for Zuko and himself, and kneels to drink it.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Some call lightning the "cold-blooded fire". It is precise and deadly, like Azula. To perform the technique requires peace of mind.

Uncle drinks his tea.

ZUKO
Ah, I see. That's why we're drinking tea -- to calm the mind.

UNCLE
Oh yeah, good point! I mean, yes.

EXT. DESERTED TOWN - MOMENTS LATER

The same location as the showdown in episode 2.08. Uncle walks with some difficulty, possibly using a small walking stick as a cane.

UNCLE
There is energy all around us.

UNCLE (cont'd)
The energy is both yin and yang -- positive energy, and negative energy. Only a select few Firebenders can separate these energies...

Uncle takes Zuko's hand, and guides it through some wave motions -- each wave motion causes tiny sparks to dance from Zuko's hand in the direction he is sweeping.

UNCLE (cont'd)
This creates an imbalance. The energy wants to restore balance, and in the moment the positive and negative energy come crashing back together, you provide release and guidance, creating lightning.

Uncle demonstrates. Straining with difficulty, he performs both parts of the wind-up, energy crackling with tiny sparks. Then with painful determination, he completes the move and releases an awesome lightning blast. Zuko is delighted!

ZUKO
I'm ready to try it.

UNCLE
Remember, once you separate the energy, you do not command it -- you are simply its humble guide. Breathe first.

ZUKO
(BREATHES DEEPLY, CALMLY)

Zuko performs the wind up. Energy CRACKLES as he prepares to deliver the strike. At the moment of truth, we see a glimmer of that Zuko passion in his eyes -- and instead of lightning he releases a HUGE FIERY EXPLOSION.

ZUKO (cont'd)
(ENRAGED SCREAM)

EXT. QUARRY CAMPSITE - DAY

Aang is ready for his Earthbending test. Katara is there offering her support.

TOPH
This time we're going to try something a little different. Instead of moving a rock, you're going to stop a rock. Get in your horse stance...

Aang does. Toph creates a long EARTH RAMP in front of Aang, at the top of which is a huge boulder.

TOPH (cont'd)
I'm going to roll that boulder down at you. If you have the attitude of an Earthbender, you'll stay in your stance and stop the rock. Like this.

She demonstrates the simple "stopping move" with her hands. Aang is visibly worried, but smiles. Katara speaks up.

KATARA
Sorry Toph, but are you sure this is really the best way to teach Aang Earthbending?

Toph again humors Katara, who is pleased at this.

TOPH
I'm glad you said something. Actually there is a better way.

Toph walks up behind Aang and puts a blindfold on him.

TOPH (cont'd)
This way you'll really have to sense the vibrations of the boulder to stop it.
(beat)
Thank you, Katara.

AANG
(sarcastic)
Yeah, thanks Katara.

KATARA
(NERVOUS CHUCKLE)

Aang spirals his feet in just as he learned, to get rooted. Toph releases the boulder at the top of the ramp. It gains speed and comes crashing down towards Aang.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

EXT. QUARRY CAMPSITE - MOMENT LATER

The boulder comes hurtling downhill towards blindfolded Aang. Katara covers her eyes... Aang prepares to do the "stopping move"... but at the last possible instant, as the boulder is about to reach him, Aang panics and leaves his stance, doing an AIRBENDING MOVE to leap out of the way of the boulder, which CRASHES hard nearby. Aang, disappointed in himself, takes off his blindfold and comes up to Toph.

AANG
I guess I just panicked... I don't know what to say.

Toph turns and gets in his face, like a drill instructor.

TOPH
There's nothing TO say. You blew it. You had a perfect stance, and perfect form, but when it came right down to it, you didn't have the GUTS.

AANG
I know, I'm sorry.

TOPH
Yeah, you are sorry. If you're not tough enough to stop the rock, then you could at least give it the pleasure of smooshing you, instead of jumping out of the way like a jelly-boned wimp. Now -- do you have what it takes to face that rock like an Earthbender?!

There's a long beat -- instead of being toughened by Toph's speech, Aang is broken and disheartened.

AANG
No. I don't think I do...

Katara rushes to Aang.

KATARA
Aang, it's no big deal. You'll take a break, and try Earthbending again when you're ready. Besides, you still have a lot of Waterbending to work on. Okay?

AANG
Yeah, that sounds good.

They walk off together.

TOPH
Yeah, whatever, go splash around until you feel better.

EXT. DESERTED TOWN - DAY

This is moments after Zuko failed to perform the lightning technique. Some nearby brush is burning from his misfire. Zuko is very angry.

ZUKO
Why can't I do it?! Instead of lightning, it keeps exploding in my face -- like everything always does!

UNCLE
I was afraid this might happen. You will not be able to master lightning until you have dealt with the turmoil inside you.

ZUKO
What turmoil?!

UNCLE
Zuko, you must let go of your feelings of shame if you want your anger to go away.

Zuko takes a breath, and calms himself down as much as he can.

ZUKO
But I don't feel any shame at all -- I'm as proud as ever.

UNCLE
Prince Zuko, pride is not the opposite of shame, but its source.
(beat)
True humility is the only antidote to shame.

ZUKO
(head down)
Well, my life has been nothing <u>but</u> humbling lately.

Uncle puts a hand on Zuko's shoulder.

UNCLE
I have another idea. I will teach you a Firebending move that even Azula doesn't know -- because I made it up myself...

Zuko looks intrigued.

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - DAY

Sokka is still trapped in an awkward position. The cute animal he had been hunting approaches him.

SOKKA
You probably think I deserve this, don't you?
(beat)
Look, I'm sorry I hunted you but that's just the natural order of things. Big things eat smaller things. Nothing personal. But this time it didn't work out that way.

A long beat as the animal turns its head to the side, curiously.

CUTE ANIMAL
(CUTE SOUNDS)

SOKKA
I admit it -- you're cute.

CUTE ANIMAL
(DIFFERENT CUTE SOUND)

SOKKA
Okay! You convinced me. If I get out of this alive, it's a karmically-correct vegetarian existence for me. No meat. Even though meat is so tasty.

The animal scurries off, and returns with a piece of fruit.

SOKKA (cont'd)
Hey! Looks like my karma is already paying off.

It drops it a few feet from Sokka.

SOKKA (cont'd)
That's okay, I got it. (EFFORT SOUNDS)

With awkward effort, Sokka manages to contort his wrist behind him and retrieve his boomerang. He throws it with a weak flip of his wrist, and it lands right next to the fruit.

SOKKA (cont'd)
Now come back, boomerang.

EXT. QUARRY CAMPSITE - DAY

Aang and Katara are in the water area of the quarry, practicing Waterbending techniques while they talk.

KATARA
You know this block you're having is only temporary, right?

AANG
I don't want to talk about it.

KATARA
You do realize that's the problem, don't you? If you faced this issue instead of avoiding it.

AANG
I know I know I know I know! I get it, alright? "I need to face it head on, like a rock." But I just can't do it. I don't know why I can't, but I can't.

KATARA
Aang, if fire and water are opposites, then what's the opposite of air?

AANG
I guess it's earth.

KATARA
That's why it's so hard for you to get this. You're working with your natural opposite. But you'll figure it out -- I know you will.

This time her words seem to encourage Aang. Aang nods.

KATARA (cont'd)
Think fast!

She tosses a REED at Aang. He thinks fast, executing a perfect water whip/sword move, cutting it in half. She tosses another reed which he expertly slices lengthwise.

KATARA (cont'd)
Excellent -- you have the reflexes of a Waterbending master.

AANG
Thanks, Katara.

Then he turns to her and bows.

AANG (cont'd)
Sifu Katara.

Katara smiles.

EXT. DESERTED TOWN - DAY

Uncle sits cross-legged and draws in the dirt with a stick. Zuko pays attention as he makes a square, and draws symbols of the four elements in the corners as he speaks. First he draws fire.

UNCLE
Fire is the element of power. The people of the Fire Nation have desire and will, and the energy and drive to achieve what they want.

He draws the Earth symbol.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Earth is the element of substance. The people of the Earth Kingdom are diverse, and strong. They are persistent and enduring.

He draws the air symbol.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Air is the element of freedom. The Air Nomads detached themselves from worldly concerns, and found peace and freedom. Also, they apparently had pretty good senses of humor.

He draws the water symbol.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Water is the element of change. The people of the Water Tribe are capable of adapting to many things. They have a deep sense of community and love that holds them together through anything.

ZUKO
(respectful)
Why are you telling me these things?

UNCLE
It is important to draw wisdom from many different places. If we take it from only one place, it becomes rigid and stale. Understanding others -- the other elements, and the other nations -- will help you become whole.

ZUKO
All this four elements talk is sounding like Avatar stuff.

UNCLE
It is the combination of the four elements in one person that makes the Avatar so powerful. But it can make you more powerful too. You see, the technique I am about to teach you is one I learned by studying the Waterbenders.

Off Zuko's intrigued reaction...

EXT. QUARRY CAMPSITE - DAY

Aang is meditating. Toph walks over. She reveals a pouch of nuts.

TOPH
Aang, I found these nuts in your bag. I figured you wouldn't mind, and besides, even if you did, you're too much of a pushover to do anything about it.

AANG
As a matter of fact, I don't mind. I'm happy to share anything I have.

TOPH
You know, I'm really glad you feel that way. Because I also have this great new nutcracker.

She reveals Aang's staff. She drops a nut to the ground and SMASH! She cracks it open with the staff (maybe Momo catches a few stray nut pieces), as Aang winces.

AANG
Actually, I'd prefer if you didn't--

SMASH! Aang winces.

AANG (cont'd)
That's an antique, hand-crafted by the monks--

SMASH! Aang winces.

AANG (cont'd)
It's a delicate instrument.

TOPH
It's not the only delicate instrument around here.

Toph pops a few of the nuts into her mouth, and walks off twirling the staff. Aang goes back to meditating.

AANG
(trying to relax)
Ohmm...

KATARA (O.S.)
Hey Aang, have you seen--

AANG
(eyes closed)
Meditating here!

KATARA
It's important. It's almost sundown and Sokka isn't back yet. I think we should search for him.

Aang opens his eyes and looks concerned.

AANG
We'll find him faster if we split up.

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - DAY

Sokka's still stuck.

SOKKA
Okay, karma person -- or thing -- whoever's in charge of this stuff. If I can just get out of this situation alive I will give up meat and... sarcasm. Okay?
(beat)
That's all I got. It's pretty much my whole identity -- Sokka, the meat and sarcasm guy -- but I'm willing to be Sokka the veggies and straight talk fellow. Deal?

At that moment, Aang appears over the hill and spots Sokka.

SOKKA (cont'd)
Aang! Thank goodness! Have you got any meat?

AANG
Sokka! Are you okay?

Aang grabs Sokka's hand and PULLS. He doesn't budge. Aang pulls even harder.

SOKKA
Stop, stop! You're going to pull my fingers off but I don't think the rest of me is coming.

AANG
Hmm. I bet I can Airbend you out of here.

Aang does an Airbending move, but it just makes the crevasse less stable, and blows up a big cloud of debris, leaving Sokka's face covered in dust.

SOKKA
Seriously, Aang -- I know you're new at it, but I could use a little Earthbending here. How about it?

AANG
I can't. I can't do it.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - SUNDOWN

Aang is next to Sokka, who is trapped and dusty.

SOKKA
Well, if you can't Earthbend me out of here -- go get Toph!

AANG
I can't do that either.

SOKKA
You can't?! Why not?

AANG
It would just be really... uncomfortable.

SOKKA
Uncomfortable? Well, I wouldn't want you to feel uncomfortable.

AANG
Thanks, Sokka.

Aang takes a seat next to Sokka's head, and starts unloading his troubles on his captive therapist.

AANG (cont'd)
This whole Earthbending thing really has me confused. There's so much pressure -- everyone expects me to get it right away. It puts me in a really awkward position.

SOKKA
Awkward position. I think I know the feeling.

AANG
If I try, I fail. But if I don't try... I'm never going to get it. I feel like I'm caught between a rock and a hard place.

SOKKA
Hmm. How 'bout that.

Just then, the cute animal from before returns.

SOKKA (cont'd)
Aang, this is my friend... Foo Foo Cuddly-poops Aang.

Aang picks up the cub.

AANG
Aw, what a cute name for a little baby sabre-tooth moose-lion cub.

SOKKA
Really? He looks nothing like a sabre-tooth moose-lion.

AANG
It's hard to tell before their giant teeth and horns grow in.
(to cub)
Watcha doing out here, little guy? Did you lose your mama?

As if to answer:

SABRE-TOOTH MOOSE-LIONESS (O.S.)
(LOUD ROAR)

Off Aang and Sokka's looks...

EXT. DESERTED TOWN - SUNDOWN

Uncle begins to show Zuko a new technique.

UNCLE
Waterbenders deal with the flow of energy. A Waterbender lets their defense become their offense, turning their opponent's energy against them. I learned a way to do this with lightning.

ZUKO
You can teach me to redirect lightning?

UNCLE
If you let the energy in your own body flow, the lightning will follow it. You must create a pathway from your fingertips, up your arm to your shoulder, then down into your stomach.

Uncle indicates his stomach.

UNCLE (cont'd)
The stomach is the source of energy in your body -- it is called the "Sea of Chi". Only in my case, it is more like a vast ocean! (LAUGHS AT HIS OWN JOKE)

He pats his belly, then continues.

UNCLE (cont'd)
From the stomach, you direct it up again and out the other arm. The stomach detour is critical -- you must not let the lightning pass through your heart, where the damage could be deadly.

UNCLE (cont'd)
You may wish to try a physical motion, to get a feel for the pathway's flow. Like this.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Now, are you focusing your energy? Can you feel your own Chi flowing in, down, up, and out?

ZUKO
(closes his eyes)
I think so...

Uncle does a move, starting at one hand and flowing down to his stomach and then out the other arm. It should look amusingly like "popping". Zuko tries, but is a bit stiff.

UNCLE
Come on, you've got to feel the flow!

Uncle does it again. Zuko tries again, and this time he gets it! Uncle does it again and this time slaps Zuko on the hand, who continues the wave -- he finishes slapping Uncle's hand, who ends it with a flourish.

UNCLE (cont'd)
Excellent! You've got it!

ZUKO
Great! I'm ready to try with real lightning.

UNCLE
What, are you crazy? Lightning's very dangerous.

ZUKO
I thought that was the point? You teaching me how to protect myself from it.

UNCLE
Yeah, but I'm not going to shoot lightning at you. If you are lucky, you will never have to use this technique at all.

Zuko notices some dark clouds in the distance, toward the peak of the mountain.

ZUKO
Well if you won't help me... I'll find my own lightning.

Zuko gets on the ostrich horse, and heads off. Uncle looks concerned.

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - LATER

Aang and Sokka are face to face with a terrifying sabre-tooth moose-lioness.

AANG
Hey there, we found your cub.

Aang puts the cub down, which quickly runs off for shelter.

AANG (cont'd)
See? We have no problem with you, we're friendly.

The moose-lioness lowers her horns, and begins raring like a bull about to charge.

SOKKA
Aang, this is bad -- you gotta get me out of here--

The moose-lioness CHARGES at Aang and Sokka.

SOKKA (cont'd)
Ahhhh!!

Just before it stampedes Sokka's head, Aang manages a sort of combination matador/Airbender move to get the moose-lioness slightly off course, and she misses Sokka.

SOKKA (cont'd)
This is really bad.

As she reaches the other side and begins to prepare for another pass--

SOKKA (cont'd)
Please, Aang, you have to Earthbend me out. There's no other way!

Aang nods. He spirals his feet down, getting in his stance -- this should feel like it's about to be the moment of truth -- then executes the move with great gusto. But WHOOSH! Again, it's Aang who goes flying backwards and crash lands forty feet away. The moose-lioness charges Sokka again -- Aang gets up to see Sokka in trouble.

AANG
Oh no!

Aang does a fast running and diving move to protect Sokka, like a combination secret service/Airbending move, averting the moose-lioness just in time. As the moose-lioness prepares to charge again, Aang steps a few feet away from Sokka to try and distract her. He does a funny little dance.

AANG (cont'd)
Woo-hoo, look at me!

But she is not distracted by the dance, and charges Sokka again. This time, instead of averting her, Aang leaps in front of Sokka to block her and BLASTS her back with Airbending.

SOKKA
Please don't leave me again!

AANG
I won't.

Aang stands in front of Sokka, ready for another charge. He looks firm and determined and rooted -- he looks like an Earthbender. When the moose-lioness comes, again he BLASTS her back. The moose-lioness gets up again -- she senses Aang's resolve. He's staying put, and he's not going to back down. The moose-lioness walks off (possibly picking up her cub from a nearby bush, by its neck.) Suddenly they hear CLAPPING. The dust clears, revealing Toph sitting nearby.

SOKKA
What are you doing here?

TOPH
Just enjoying the show.

AANG
What? You were there the whole time?

TOPH
Pretty much.

AANG
Why didn't you do something? Sokka was in trouble -- I was in trouble! You could have gotten him out and helped us get away.

TOPH
Guess it just didn't occur to me.

She drops a nut on the ground, and reveals Aang's staff. But before she can deliver the blow to the nut, Aang catches the staff.

AANG
Enough. I want my staff back.

She releases his staff.

TOPH
Do it now.

AANG
What?

TOPH
Earthbend, twinkle toes! You just stood your ground against a crazy beast, and even more impressive, you stood your ground against me. You've got the stuff!

AANG
But--

TOPH
Do it!

Aang gets in a stance, and does a move -- and some rocks go flying! Aang is elated, and so is Toph.

TOPH (cont'd)
You did it! You're an Earthbender!

AANG
I can't believe it!

SOKKA
Aw, this is really a wonderful touching moment. So could you get me out of here so I can give you both a big snuggly hug?

AANG
No problem, Sokka.

But as Aang goes to Earthbend Sokka out, Toph stops him.

TOPH
Actually, you should probably let me do that. You're still a little new to this, you might accidentally crush him.

SOKKA
Yeah, no crushing please.

Toph does a move that elegantly and easily releases Sokka from his crevasse prison.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. QUARRY CAMPSITE - LATER

Katara sees Aang and Sokka coming.

KATARA
You found him!

She throws her arms around her brother.

SOKKA
(profound)
The whole time I was in that hole... not knowing if I would live or die... it makes a man think about what's really important. I realized--

AANG
(interrupting)
Hey, Katara, look what I can do!

Katara leaves Sokka to see Aang's demonstration. Sokka shrugs.

Aang does a cool Earthbending move -- and she's delighted.

KATARA
You did it! I knew you would.
(sotto to Toph)
You tried the positive reinforcement, didn't you?

TOPH
Yup, it worked wonders.

Appa starts waking up -- he YAWNS, and stretches out his legs.

AANG
Appa, Appa!

Aang runs over and stands in front of Appa.

AANG (cont'd)
I can Earthbend now! The key is being completely rooted -- physically and mentally -- unmoveable!

Aang gets in a firm stance. Then Appa playfully knocks Aang over, easily. Aang LAUGHS.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - NIGHT

Zuko stands in the middle of a raging storm. It's gray and pouring. We here some THUNDER and see a flash (but not a bolt) of lightning.

ZUKO
(to the heavens)
You've always thrown everything you could at me. Well I can take it -- and now I can give it back!

Lightning strikes, but not Zuko.

ZUKO (cont'd)
Go on, strike me! You've never held back before!

But nothing happens.

ZUKO (cont'd)
(EMOTIONAL SCREAM)

Tears stream down Zuko's face as he stands defiantly in the storm.

END OF SHOW